

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY THE CLERK OF THE LEGISLATURE  
Transcriber's Office  
FLOOR DEBATE

January 15, 2004 LB 962, 1075, 1086

Nebraskans together in a task force, put all issues on the table, and recommend solutions. Therefore, I ask you to pass LB 1086, and I will sign it into law. Another area in vital need of reform is our state's water policy. We have struggled to achieve balance in our stewardship of water. Irrigation is our lifeblood, but it's fueled by a finite resource. Poor water management in this generation will come at enormous cost for the next generation. That's why the work of the Water Policy Task Force, sponsored by Senator Schrock, was so critical. And I thank both Senator Schrock and Stuhr for leading this effort. This task force brought all water interests to the table. The bill before you may not be the last legislative word on water policy, but it represents very commendable work, and it deserves to become Nebraska law. Pass LB 962, and I will sign it into law. I have reserved my final comments today for our children. About 90 days ago, I appointed a Children's Task Force, and I gave the members a very direct charge--to turn our child protective system upside down and make recommendations to fix it. And turn it upside down they did. Ladies and gentlemen, these hardworking task force members deserve our sincere appreciation, as do Senators Aguilar and Stuthman, for their commitment to this reform effort to our children. After hours of sad and painstaking work, the task force members have laid their recommendations in our hands. They ask us to adopt recommendations that I believe constitute the most comprehensive effort to reform the way we protect our children in our state's history. The key recommendations ask us to do five things: increase the number of case workers, improve accountability, enhance the collaboration between all entities responsible for protecting children, expand the role of the child advocacy centers across the state, and authorize the Attorney General's Office to prosecute abuse and neglect cases in jurisdictions lacking a separate Juvenile Court. I am grateful for the work of the task force members, and I embrace their key recommendations. These recommendations are embodied in my budget proposal and in LB 1075. On behalf of our children and the task force, I ask you to pass this legislation so I can sign it into law. Each one of these five major areas of reform represent tough issues that require difficult decisions. I ask you to join me in supporting each one of them. Five years ago, we gathered in this Chamber, seasoned veterans and rookies. In